

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-14. (Cancelled).

15. (Previously Presented) A method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel, the method of comprising:

establishing a depth of a blood vessel puncture of a patient;

loading an introducer with a sponge pledget by hydrating and compressing the pledget, the introducer having a lumen including a staging chamber and a delivery chamber;

loading the introducer over a guidewire positioned in the blood vessel by inserting the guidewire through the hydrated and compressed pledget; and

ejecting the pledget adjacent the blood vessel puncture to facilitate hemostasis while maintaining the guidewire in place.

16. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 15, wherein establishing a depth of a blood vessel is performed by introducing a tract dilator into a tissue tract until a distal end of the tract dilator abuts an exterior of the blood vessel wall.

17. (Original) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 16, wherein a depth of the tract is indicated by a depth indicating member.

18. (Previously Amended) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 15, wherein establishing a depth of a blood vessel is performed by introducing the introducer over the guidewire and into a tissue tract until a distal end of the introducer abuts an exterior wall of the blood vessel.

19. (Original) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 15, wherein the pledget is partially ejected, compression is applied until hemostasis begins, and the pledget is then fully ejected.

20-21. (Cancelled).

22. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 15, wherein the sponge pledget is rolled from a sheet of absorbable sponge prior to loading into the introducer.

23. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 15, wherein loading the introducer includes injecting fluid into the introducer to hydrate and compress the pledget.

24. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 23, wherein the introducer is provided with a distal vent for facilitating loading of the introducer.

25. (Previously Presented) A method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel, the method comprising:

loading an introducer with a pledget of sponge;

loading the introducer over a guidewire positioned in the blood vessel by inserting the guidewire through the loaded pledget;

advancing the introducer with the loaded pledget through a tissue tract extending from a patient's skin to the puncture in the wall of the blood vessel without advancing the pledget relative to the introducer; and

ejecting the pledget adjacent the puncture in the wall of the blood vessel to facilitate hemostasis.

26. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 25, wherein loading the introducer involves hydrating and loading the pledget into the introducer.

27. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 25, wherein loading the introducer involves compressing and loading the pledget into the introducer.

28. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 25, wherein loading the introducer over the guidewire involves piercing the pledget with the guidewire.

29. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 25, further comprising establishing a depth of the puncture in the wall of the blood vessel.

30. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 29, wherein establishing a depth of a puncture is performed by introducing a tract dilator into a tissue tract until a distal end of the tract dilator abuts an exterior of the blood vessel wall.

31. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 29, wherein establishing a depth of a puncture is performed by introducing the introducer over the guidewire and into a tissue until a distal end of the introducer abuts an exterior wall of the blood vessel.

32. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 25, wherein the ejected pledget is positioned against an outer wall of the blood vessel.

33. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 25, wherein the pledget expands upon delivery to fill the available space and provide localized compression.

34. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 25, wherein the ejected pledget expands more quickly when wetted than a pledget of dry sponge material.

35. (Previously Presented) A method for advancing a pledget of sponge through the skin and subcutaneous tissue overlying a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel, the method comprising:

loading an introducer with a pledget of sponge, the introducer having a lumen including a staging chamber and a delivery chamber;

loading the introducer over a guidewire positioned in the blood vessel by inserting the guidewire through the loaded pledget; and

advancing the introducer through the skin and subcutaneous tissue overlying the puncture in the wall of the blood vessel.

36. (Previously Presented) The method for advancing a pledget of sponge through the skin and subcutaneous tissue overlying a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 35, wherein loading the introducer involves hydrating and loading the pledget into the introducer.

37. (Previously Presented) The method for advancing a pledget of sponge through the skin and subcutaneous tissue overlying a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 35, wherein loading the introducer involves compressing and loading the pledget into the introducer.

38. (Previously Presented) The method for advancing a pledget of sponge through the skin and subcutaneous tissue overlying a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 35, wherein loading the introducer over the guidewire involves piercing the pledget with the guidewire.

39. (Previously Presented) The method for advancing a pledget of sponge through the skin and subcutaneous tissue overlying a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 35, further comprising establishing a depth of the puncture in the wall of the blood vessel.

40. (Previously Presented) The method for advancing a pledget of sponge through the skin and subcutaneous tissue overlying a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 39, wherein establishing a depth of the puncture is performed by introducing a tract dilator into the subcutaneous tissue until a distal end of the tract dilator abuts an exterior of the blood vessel wall.

41. (Previously Presented) The method of advancing a pledget of sponge through the skin and subcutaneous tissue overlying a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 39, wherein establishing a depth of the puncture is performed by introducing the introducer over the guidewire and into the subcutaneous tissue until a distal end of the introducer abuts an exterior wall of the blood vessel.

42-60. (Cancelled).

61. (Previously Presented) A method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel, the method comprising:

loading an introducer with a pledget of a hemostasis material, wherein the loaded pledget is located in a distal end of the introducer;

advancing the introducer with the loaded pledget through a tissue tract extending from a patient's skin to the puncture in the wall of the blood vessel without advancing the pledget relative to the introducer;

locating an exterior of the blood vessel; and

ejecting the pledget adjacent the exterior of the blood vessel.

62. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 61, wherein the exterior of the blood vessel is located by tactile feedback upon contact with the exterior of the blood vessel.

63. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 61, wherein the pledget of hemostasis material is absorbed within the body of the patient.

64. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 61, further comprising loading the introducer over a guidewire by inserting the guidewire through the loaded pledget.

65. (Previously Presented) The method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture in the wall of a blood vessel according to claim 61, wherein ejecting the pledget is performed by withdrawing the introducer.

66. (Previously Presented) A method for facilitating hemostasis of a puncture at an exterior surface of a blood vessel wall, comprising:

advancing an introducer loaded with a pledget and a pusher through a tissue tract extending from a patient's skin to the exterior surface without advancing the pledget relative to the introducer and the pusher;

holding the pusher stationary relative to the introducer at said exterior surface;

withdrawing said introducer proximally to expose a distal end of the pledget;
and

applying a slight forward pressure on said pusher, whereby the pledget is simultaneously partially exposed and compressed against said exterior surface of the blood vessel puncture.

67. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 66 wherein said withdrawing comprises exposing approximately seventy-five percent (75%) of the pledget.

68. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 66 wherein said withdrawing comprises retreating said introducer to an identified marker on said introducer.

69. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 66 wherein said withdrawing further comprises:

withdrawing a guidewire from said pusher and said introducer.

70. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 66 whereby said inserting further comprises mating a first fitting of said pusher with a second fitting of said introducer.

71. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 66 further comprising:
maintaining a slight forward pressure on said pledget with said pusher; and
withdrawing said introducer.